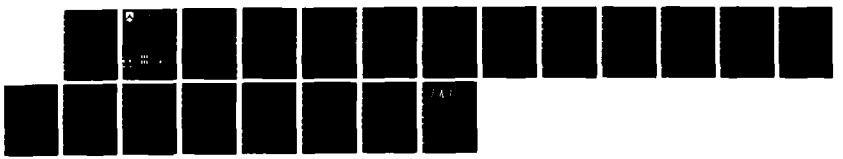
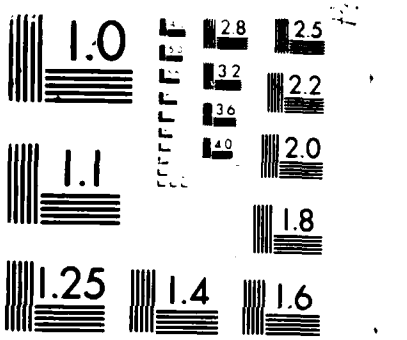
AD-A177 844 AIR SANCTUARIES IN LIMITED WAR: A KOREAN WAR CASE STUDY 1/1
(U) AIR WAR COLL MAXWELL AFB AL C W HINKLE MAR 86
AU-AWC-86-898

UNCLASSIFIED F/G 15/7 NL




1.0
2.8
2.5
3.2
2.2
3.6
4.0
2.0
1.1
1.8
1.25
1.4
1.6

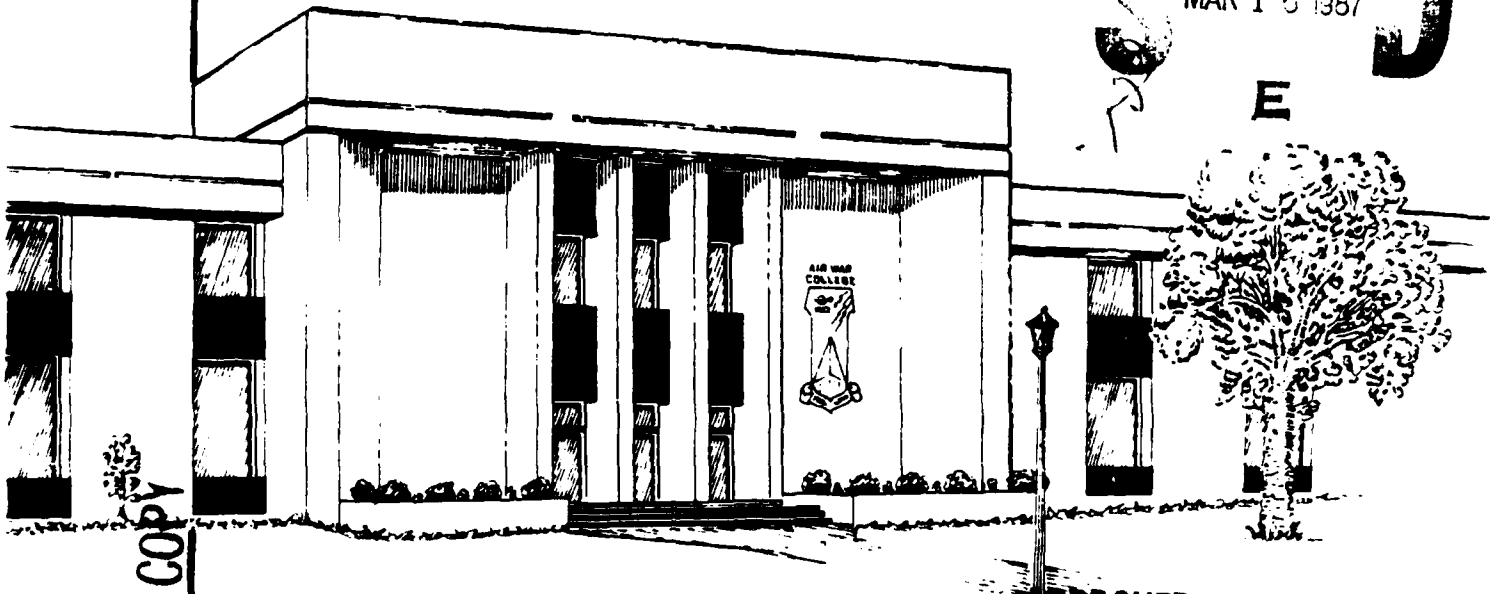
AIR WAR COLLEGE

RESEARCH REPORT

No. AU-AWC-86-098

AIR SANCTUARIES IN LIMITED WAR: A KOREAN WAR CASE STUDY

By LT COL CHARLES W. HINKLE



AIR UNIVERSITY
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

AIR WAR COLLEGE
AIR UNIVERSITY

AIR SANCTUARIES IN LIMITED WAR: A Korean War Case Study

by

Charles W. Hinkle
Lt Colonel, USAF

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH

REQUIREMENT

Research Advisor: Lt Colonel Lorenzo M. Crowell, Jr.

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

MARCH 1986

DISCLAIMER-ABSTAINER

This research report represents the views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Air War College or the Department of the Air Force.

AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: Air Sanctuaries in Limited War: A Korean War Case Study

AUTHOR: Charles W. Hinkle, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

Examines the reasons for Chinese and North Korean air sanctuaries in the Korean War and the objections thereto by both civilian and military officials. Argues that UN forces also had air sanctuaries granted by the communist forces and that the Chinese were likewise fighting a limited war. Provides examples of border violations by UN forces.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lt Colonel Charles W. Hinkle (M.P.A., Golden Gate University) has been interested in the Korean War since his first military duty there in 1971. He has served two remote tours at Osan Airbase, one with the Air Rescue and Recovery Service as a helicopter pilot in 1974-75, and one with the Strategic Air Command as the commander of a U-2 detachment in 1984-85. He also served in South Vietnam and Thailand with the Strategic Air Command flying B-52's and Ch-3 helicopters. Lt Colonel *Hinkle* is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1986.

AIR SANCTUARIES IN LIMITED WAR: A Korean War Case Study

When the Communist North Korean People's Army (NKPA) invaded South Korea on 25 June 1950, the military forces of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the US were caught unaware and were forced to rapidly retreat south. During the early stages of the conflict, elements of the US Far East Air Forces (FEAF) bombed and strafed the invading NKPA but were restricted to targets south of the 38th parallel. This restriction was the first of many with which FEAF would be burdened during the remainder of the conflict. Indeed, this became the first significant US war which was limited in terms of both scope and firepower application. For that reason, it was a war difficult for the American public and its fighting forces to accept or understand. As the war progressed, the United Nations granted sanctuaries to the enemy which were off-limits to attack by UN forces. Much has been said and written to the effect that UN forces were unnecessarily hampered by such restrictions. In actuality, however, both sides enjoyed sanctuaries. This essay examines the reasons for those sanctuaries, the objections to them by UN military forces, how the Chinese took advantage of them, and finally, identifies air sanctuaries which the UN forces enjoyed during the conflict.

As stated above, FEAF could not initially attack targets north of the 38th parallel except in self-defense.[1]

This restriction was due to US uncertainty concerning the reason for the invasion, and fear that US operations north of the parallel might result in conflict with Chinese or Soviet forces. On 29 June General Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief Far East (CINCFE), and Lt General George E. Stratemeyer, FEAF Commanding General, visited Suwon Air Base just south of Seoul. During that visit, North Korean aircraft attacked the base several times. General Stratemeyer took the opportunity to argue that air superiority was an absolute must if ground forces were to be protected from enemy aircraft. Furthermore, the necessity to provide constant air cover was exhausting air efforts which might be more profitably employed elsewhere. He asked that he be allowed to strike North Korean air bases to eliminate the threat. General MacArthur agreed with his rationale and authorized immediate strikes against those targets, believing that it was within his authority as theater commander to do so.[2] On 30 June, Secretary of Defense Louis A. Johnson authorized MacArthur to:

> ...extend your operations into Northern Korea against air bases, depots, tank farms,troop columns, and other such purely military targets, if and when , in your judgement, this becomes essential for the peformance of your missions...or to avoid unnecessary casualties to our forces. Special care will be taken to insure that operations in North Korea stay well clear of the frontiers of Manchuria or the Soviet Union.[3]

These restrictions against action in Manchuria and Siberia remained throughout the conflict.

The reasons for the sanctuaries in Manchuria and Siberia were primarily political. As Carl Von Clauswitz has stated in On War, "War is merely the continuation of policy by other means."[4] US National Command Authorities, as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the United Nations allies, feared that the conflict could very easily escalate into World War III. Thus, from the beginning of hostilities, the US and other UN countries that extended support to South Korea held to the basic policy that the conflict must not be allowed to spread beyond the borders of Korea. "The whole effort of our policy is to prevent general war and not have it occur," stated Secretary of State Dean Acheson. "Our allies," he added, "believe this just as much as we believe it, and their immediate danger is much greater than ours because if general war broke out they would be in a most exposed and dangerous position."[5] According to Secretary of Defense George Marshall, the restrictions were the result of "an intermingling...of political necessities along with military directions."[6] The restrictions were also a recognition that our conventional military strength was not great enough to win an all-out war in Asia. Although war with the Soviet Union might come, Korea was neither the place nor the time to fight it. As the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted in July, "It would be militarily unsound for the United States to commit large forces against the USSR in an area of slight strategic importance, as well as one of

Soviet choice."[7] In Europe as well as the US there was considerable fear, or at least uncertainty, that the Korean action was simply a move by the communists to tie the US down in Asia, the real target being Europe. Those fears, along with the recognition that the US could not win an Asian war, dictated that certain enemy areas be sacrosanct.

To an America that had just experienced several years of total war and had emerged victorious, the Korean war was exceptionally unpleasant and confusing. After all, the US military had proven its invincibility and America had demonstrated its superior technology. But, as stated by Forest Grieves in Conflict and Order, America "had forgotten that it took the combined military might of most of the world and several bitter years of war to defeat three powerful, but nevertheless relatively small countries--Germany, Italy, and Japan."[8] Hence, there was widespread suspicion that political meddling was preventing superior UN forces from defeating an obviously inferior enemy. It was even rumored that President Truman was in danger of impeachment.[9] Dissatisfaction with the war was not limited to the civilian sector, of course. General MacArthur felt that he could not win the war when his actions were so limited, and was fired for saying so publicly. In later testimony before Congress, he stated that "...once war is forced upon us, there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it

to a swift end. War's very object is victory--not prolonged indecision. In war indeed, there can be no substitute for victory."[10]

The US airmen themselves found the restrictions no less distasteful. Colonel Walker Mahurin asserted that the State Department considered China a noncombatant while the enemy flew from that nation to kill American men. "The UN forces lost 1000's of men because of the political, as opposed to the military solution to the problems of the Korean War."[11] In an end-of-tour report, Colonel Harrison R. Thyng, 4th Wing Commander, outlined numerous restrictions with which the airmen had to contend: "...could never enter the Manchurian sanctuary, could not strafe the Yalu bridges, had to avoid Panmunjon and close proximity to the Russian border. The Yalu boundary afforded a regular means of escape to enemy aircraft."[12] Minutes of the FEAF Formal Target Committee Meeting, 21 August 1952, indicate some of the difficulty the Yalu boundary restriction had upon fighters escorting bombing missions in the far north of Korea: "F86's given impossible task in providing protection for the fighter bombers in this area [Sinuiju] since they may not overfly Manchurian territory."[13] A report by Colonel Francis S. Gabreski, 51st Wing Commander, stated that "For the most effective use in the deployment of our F-86 fighters it would be highly desirable to strike the enemy before taking off from its home base, or immediately

prior to landing, however, political restrictions prevent the Air Force from using its power most effectively."[14] These objections led the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider the policy of "hot pursuit," whereby UN pilots engaged with enemy aircraft over Korea could pursue the fleeing enemy into Manchuria and even strafe them after they landed.[15]

In spite of these restrictions, however, FEAF managed to maintain air superiority throughout Korea for the duration of the war. It routinely bombed North Korean air bases with the result that after 1951 the Chinese and North Koreans made no serious attempts to station aircraft south of the Yalu. In June of 1951 the Chinese Communists possessed a total of 1,050 combat planes consisting of 690 fighters, ground attack, and light bombers which were placed in Manachuria.[16] Even though the UN forces were outnumbered six-to-one in frontline aircraft, they still managed a kill ratio of eight-to-one. Enemy air forces never seriously threatened UN ground forces. Although in theory the communists had enough airpower to threaten UN forces both in the air and on the ground, they were conspicuously lacking in aggressiveness. As stated by General T.R. Milton in a 1978 speech at a USAF Airpower Symposium, "In Korea, our F-86's had to go to Mig Alley for an engagement. The air south of the Yalu was ours alone to use as we wished--for B-29's, transports, or close air support."[17] Although the exact reasons for Chinese passiveness may never be known, it

can probably be attributed to statements by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff that they would consider attacking enemy bases outside Korea if UN air and ground forces were seriously threatened by enemy air.[18] Since the communists apparently accepted the air situation, there seemed little rationale for UN air forces to strike the bases in Manchuria and risk World War III. It was this strange combination of continued UN success in the air battles and a Chinese reluctance to seek air superiority or threaten UN ground forces that ironically ensured the continued sanctity of their bases in Manchuria. The policy of "hot pursuit" was thus overcome by events and the JCS never had to decide the issue.

There is, however, ample evidence that the Chinese sanctuaries were not totally immune from attack by UN airpower. Walker Mahurin in his book Honest John cites numerous examples of US pilots deliberately crossing the Manchurian border in pursuit of Migs or simply to strafe communist air bases. Although few of these attacks or incidents have been officially documented, it appears that all the smoke on this subject is due more to actual incidents than to the mere presence of a communist smoke machine. Mahurin describes one incident in which a returning pilot, Lieutenant Bill Ginther, insisted that his gun film be destroyed because it showed him attacking a Mig about ten feet above the Chinese airbase at Antung. According to

Mahurin, the film showed row after row of Mig's on each side of the runway with Russian crewmembers standing on the wings and fuselages watching as Ginther chased and destroyed his quarry.[19] There is evidence from General Stratemeyer's Diary that an F-51 of the 67th Fighter Bomber Squadron strafed a Manchurian airbase on 27 August 1950. The flight leader, 1st Lieutenant Ray I. Carter was censured by the wing commander, rather than going before a flight evaluation board as suggested by General Stratemeyer. On 8 October 1950 two F-80's inadvertently strafed a Soviet airbase near Rashin. As a result of this incident the two pilots were tried by courts martial and the commander of the 49th Fighter Bomber Group at Taegu, Colonel Stanton T. Smith, Jr. was relieved of his command.[20] Apparently these activities were not blatant enough or frequent enough to convince the communists that UN forces planned to destroy their bases, or that the attacks were in preparation for a ground offensive since their reactions were limited to complaints at the UN.

Although the UN pilots were undoubtedly upset that this limited war allowed the enemy to retain air sanctuaries and gave him an unfair advantage, it should be recognized that the UN forces also had sanctuaries. For example, UN bases in Japan were never threatened by enemy air or ground forces. US Naval Forces Far East (NavFE) operated with impunity out of the Sea of Japan north of the 38th parallel. They operated with the same impunity north of the 38th

parallel in the Yellow Sea. At no time did enemy air or sea forces threaten those carrier task forces, perhaps for the same reasons that they never seriously threatened UN ground forces--fear of reprisal. UN air bases in South Korea were likewise immune from enemy air attacks, with the exception of occasional incidents of night bombings by "Bedcheck Charlies" from light enemy aircraft. General Stratemeyer cautioned his subordinates to be very careful in preparing end-of-campaign reports, carefully indicating the lessons NOT learned. For example, in the FEAF Bomber Command, there were only four losses, two of which were due to enemy action and only one of those to air action. "The great tonnages they dropped and the number of aircraft they kept in commission could not have been accomplished had there been an aggressive air opponent."[21] The enormous amounts of cargo carried by FEAF Combat Cargo Command could not have been accomplished had there been an aggressive air opponent. General Stratemeyer further pointed out that after the initial two or three days, Fifth Air Force was able to concentrate practically its entire effort on supporting UN ground troops because there was no interference from hostile air.

The Korean War was a limited one which the American populace found hard to accept because they had never been exposed to such wars. Consequently, they felt it was unfair for their soldiers and airmen to have to fight from a

tactical disadvantage. But the international environment had changed considerably since the end of World WarII, and America's military strength was a mere fraction of what it had been at the end of that war. Those facts combined with the fear that the Korean incident could easily escalate into World War III made a "limited" war inevitable. What much of the American public, and many in the military, did not understand was that the UN forces were also granted advantages by the enemy and that the enemy was also fighting a limited war for limited objectives. With the advent of nuclear weapons and their subsequent proliferation, "limited" will most likely be the nature of future wars, and sanctuaries will undoubtedly be their peculiarity.

NOTES

1. The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy. Vol. III, The Korean War, Part I (Washington, 12 Apr 1978), p.90.

2. Korean Diary of Lt Gen George E. Stratemeyer, 25 Jun--20 May 1951, Vol. II, 29 Jun 1950. USAF Historical Research Center, 168.7018-16. See also Joseph C. Goulden, Korea, The Untold Story of the War (New York, NY: Times Books, 1982), p.109.

3. The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Vol. III, Part I, p.109.

4. Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ Press, 1976), p. 87.

5. Robert Frank Futrell, The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950--1953 (Wash. D.C., Office of Air Force History, 1983), p.40.

6. 82d Congress 1st Session, Military Situation in the Far East, pp.231--231.

7. John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, New York, N.Y. (Oxford Univ Press, 1982), p.111.

8. Forest L. Grieves, Conflict and Order(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), pp.134--35.

9. Ibid.

10. 82d Congress 1st Session, Military Situation in the Far East, pp.17, 103, 261.

11. Walker H. Mahurin, Honest John, New York (Van Rees Press, 1962), p.35.

12. Extracts from Diaries and Journals of Generals Stratemeyer, Partridge, and Weyland. USAF Historical Research Center, K-720.13A, Jun--Oct 1950.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Vol. III, Part I, p.315.

16. Futrell, p. 370.

17. Air Power and Warfare, The proceedings of the 8th Military History Symposium, United States Air Force Academy, 18-20 Oct 1978, Edited by Alfred F. Hurley and Robert C. Ehrhart, (Washington: Office of Air Force History, HQ USAF and US Air Force Academy, 1979), p.304.

18. The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Vol III, Part II, p.633.

19. Mahurin, pp.71-72.

20. Korean Diary of Gen Stratemeyer, 30 Aug--13 Oct 1950.

21. Extracts from Diaries and Journals of Generals Stratemeyer, Partridge, and Weyland. Memorandum from Gen Stratemeyer to V/C's and D/Ops and Plans re Analysis of Final Reports which Gen Stratemeyer expects from his major commanders, 2 Oct 1950.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Clausewitz, Carl Von. On War, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ Press, 1976.

Hurley, Alfred F. and Ehrhart, Robert C., ed. Airpower and Warfare. Washington: Office of Air Force History, HQ USAF and USAFA, 1979.

Futrell, Robert F. The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953. Washington D.C., Office of Air Force History, 1983. 823p.

Gaddis, John L. Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy. New York, Oxford University Press, 1982. 432p.

Goulden, Joseph. Korea: The Untold Story of the War. New York, Times Books, 1982. 690p.

Grieves, Forest L. Conflict and Order: An Introduction to International Relations. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1977. 409p.

Mahurin, Walker M. Honest John. New York, Van Rees Press, 1962. 313p.

Major Problems in American Foreign Policy: Documents and Essays. Volume II: Since 1914. Lexington, MS, D.C. Heath, 1984. 692p.

Momyer, Gen William. Air Power in Three Wars (WWII, Korea, Vietnam). Washington, Department of the Air Force, 1978. 358p.

O'brien, William V. The Conduct of Just and Limited War. New York, Praeger, 1981. 495p.

U.S. Air Force. Office of Air Force History. Air Superiority in World War II and Korea: An Interview with Gen James Ferguson, Gen Robert M. Lee, Gen William Momyer and Lt Gen Elwood R. Quesada. Edited by Richard H. Kohn and Joseph P. Haranan. Washington, GPO, 1983. 116p.

U.S. Army. Office of Military History. United States Army in the Korean War. Washington, 1961-. Vol. 3: Policy and Direction: The First Year. By James F. Schnabel.

DOCUMENTS

Joint Chiefs of Staff. The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy. Vol III, The Korean War, part 1. Washington, 1978. 562p.

Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy. Vol III, The Korean War, part 2. Washington, Mar 1979. 555p.

PERIODICALS

Foot, Rosemary. The Sino American Conflict in Korea: The US Assessment of China's Ability to Intervene in the War. Asian Affairs 14:160-166. Jun 1983.

END

4-87

DTIC